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President: Mr. Koonjul (Vice-President) ..... (Mauritius)

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In the absence of Ms. Rasi (Finland), Mr. Koonjul (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 10: Regional cooperation (E/2004/15 and Add. 1 and 2, E/2004/16, E/2004/17, E/2004/18, E/2004/19 and E/2004/20)

1. **The President** pointed out that information and communication technologies (ICTs) were playing an important role in the world economy, and their applications were limitless. While several of the possibilities they offered had already been exploited for useful purposes, particularly in the education, health, transport, communications and agriculture sectors, they had sometimes also been used ill-advisedly, for example by terrorist networks.

2. Information and communication technologies might not be a miracle solution for economic and social development, which was the outcome of multiple factors; but they could contribute to it in a completely new and decisive way, and play a major catalytic role. In developed and certain developing countries, events showed that ICTs had become a key factor for increasing productivity and growth, and that they could play a crucial role in national development strategies. They could also help countries attain important development objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals. Basic access to ICT services was unequal across countries, resulting in a digital divide. Although that divide was tending to be bridged, there was still a problem of access to advanced services. Awareness-raising, economic accessibility, connectivity, human resources, development and capacity-building were also elements that needed careful consideration. The United Nations regional commissions could play a specific and stimulating role in this regard, to promote information technologies for development and act as regional coordinators for strategic guidelines, coherence and promotion activities.

3. **Mr. Sardenberg** (Brazil) (Rapporteur) considered that the regional commissions had a very important role to play in the ICT domain. He drew attention to paragraphs 120 through 146 of report E/2004/15 which gave a good insight into the activities of the different regional commissions in the ICT area, and commented on path to be followed. With regard to the development and use of ICTs, the report referred to the existence of a digital divide both between countries and within them. Poor countries were at greater risk of being marginalized in a globalized knowledge-based economy. The issue of access to ICTs was therefore of primary importance, and three of the five United Nations regional commissions (ECA, ESCAP and ESCWA) had already launched programmes in that area. All had made a contribution to the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society held in Geneva.

4. While the contrasts between the countries of the ECE region were undeniable, the potential for rapid action to rectify the problem was greater than in other regions. The Bucharest Declaration had pointed the way to the development of a knowledge-based economy open to all, and reduction of the inequalities created by the digital divide.

5. The speaker drew attention to a new initiative being promoted in the ESCAP region, to integrate schools around the world in the information society. This was being trialled in India and countries from other regions, before being transposed onto a larger stage. The initiative was being led jointly by the Governments of Ireland, Canada, and Sweden.

6. In the ECLAC region, the digital divide was much more worrying than that which existed internationally, and its income distribution was more unequal than anywhere else in the world. There were also fewer online transactions there than in the ESCWA region. Nonetheless, it was worth mentioning the initiative to manufacture inexpensive computers, with which large private enterprises such as Microsoft, Intel and Philips were associated.

7. In the ECA region the African Information Society initiative provided a mechanism for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Africa.

8. In the ESCWA region, numerous problems persisted, but programmes such as those promoting regional connectivity in Yemen and Egypt were achieving great success.

9. **Ms. Schmögnerová** (Economic Commission for Europe) stated that the main achievement of ECE in terms of ICTs had been the adoption of the Bucharest Declaration, which set out the fundamental principles of the information society and defined its priorities. It was also worth noting the publication of a series of e-assessments aimed at helping member States,

especially countries with economies in transition, to move towards a knowledge-based economy. In the trade sphere, ECE was working to facilitate electronic commerce, particularly by refining standards on electronic data interchange (EDIFACT) and regulations for integrated use of paper-based and electronic documents (UNeDocs project). It was examining applied technologies in intelligent transport systems, and was introducing provisions in the relevant agreements and conventions in order to make transport systems more efficient. In the environmental domain, it was worth mentioning the ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, the aims of which were consistent with the principles and priorities set forth in the Bucharest Declaration.

10. It was generally agreed that the information society had an essential role to play in development and in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. Economies, in the ECE region particularly, were increasingly based on the exchange of information and knowledge; and ICTs could promote growth, employment and knowledge acquisition. The move to the knowledge-based economy was a new challenge not only for countries with economies in transition but also for the region's developed countries. The process should be driven by government strategies, in cooperation with other stakeholders – the private sector, and non-governmental and international organizations. While it was essential for leadership of the process to be entrusted to Governments, in particular in transition and emerging countries where public funding was a necessity, it was also important to promote public-private partnerships for the development, financing and implementation of ICTs, and for the move to the knowledge-based economy, since they would hasten the process and contribute to development. The move to the knowledge-based economy in particular meant the implementation of ICT-friendly infrastructures, development and dissemination of knowledge, forging of closer links between generations, the establishment of relations between the industrial sector and the scientific world, increased investment in research and development, implementation of a legislative framework, improvement of governance, promotion of e-commerce, and education and training. Investment in research and development tasks and in human resources occupied a vital role in the process and in the strategies of developed countries. The European Union was also committed to channelling 3 per cent of its GDP into research and development until 2010. Nor was education lagging behind, since the United States and western countries were spending roughly 4 per cent of their GDP on this sector. In contrast, some countries with economies in transition that were facing sizeable budget deficits had cut back their expenditure on research and development and education. Education in particular had been hard hit, to the point where the chances of being able to benefit from ICTs and the knowledge-based economy were compromised. When comparing the different regions, it was clear that the United States invested most in ICTs, research and development and education, and was followed by the European Union; countries with economies in transition and emerging countries were lagging far behind. That situation needed to be rectified.

11. The situation of the digital divide was paradoxical, because the ECE encompassed some of the most digitally advanced countries and also some very backward ones (in Central Asia and the Caucasus). Policies were therefore needed to prevent the divide growing wider. In particular, Governments needed to exert leadership of the move to the knowledge-based economy, increasing their investments in research and development and education, and improving ICT access and use. The problem of the economic accessibility of ICTs also needed to be addressed. Governments needed to join forces with the private sector to offer economic solutions for low-income groups to prevent them being excluded, because such exclusion could aggravate the spiral of poverty. Particular attention also needed to be paid to women, who were among the most disadvantaged in the ICT sphere. Gender inequality was particularly flagrant among groups that were already disadvantaged for other reasons, such as income, social or professional status, and ethnic origin.

12. The ECE region was more affected than others by the digital divide, for which reason it was targeting most of its efforts on countries with economies in transition to help them move towards the knowledge-based economy.

13. The regional commissions had played a major role in drafting the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action adopted at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society; and ECE had been called upon to coordinate their contributions. Co-operation from the commissions had been exemplary, and should serve as a model for future activities undertaken in common. The Economic Commission for Europe would cooperate with the other commissions in

preparing inter-regional projects for ICT implementation during the period 2006-2007, which would be financed by the Development Account.

14. **Mr. Hak-Śu Kim** (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) drew attention to the wide information technology disparities that existed in the region between rich and poor countries. Apparently among the region's 14 least developed countries, 12 landlocked countries and 14 island states, 11 had a teledensity of 25 per cent, and Internet users ranging between 10 per cent and 56 per cent of the population, whereas 25 others had a teledensity below 10 per cent, and an Internet user rate of between 0.02 per cent and 8 per cent.

15. As part of its reform process, in 2002 the Commission had established the Information, Communication and Space Technology Division, with responsibility for information technology policies and applications and space technology applications. In addition, the Tokyo Declaration of January 2003 envisaged supplying services to the Commission's developing-country members, in order to help them formulate IT strategies and policies and then apply them. The Commission had also taken steps to ensure the harmonization of legal and regulatory frameworks for e-commerce applications, and was working in the domain of space technology applications for use in disaster management, teledetection, and the geographic information system used to map poverty zones and oversee the environment. Thanks to broadband wireless networks, it ought to be possible for isolated zones to benefit from information technologies.

16. Some Governments had adopted specific initiatives, such as laying fibre-optic networks throughout Asia (Japan), or establishing an ICT training centre (Democratic People's Republic of Korea). At the same time, 19 United Nations agencies were working on IT applications within the Inter-Agency Working Group on Information and Communication Technology.

17. Lastly, some countries had taken initiatives in distance training, such as Australia; or in the field of education and utilization of ICTs, such as India or Nepal, as mentioned in paragraph 128 of the Secretary-General's report entitled "Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields."

18. **Mr. Machinea** (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) explained that ECLAC was working to encourage the preparation of national, subregional a id regional strategies focused mainly on social integration and cohesion. It was also supporting the region's integration into the global information society, in keeping with the Bávaro Declaration which was established with the World Summit on the Information Society in mind. The Commission was acting at the national, regional and international levels, first and foremost to study strategies adopted by countries to promote an information society, which was an extremely complex concept and involved three stages.

19. The first stage encompassed preparation of the strategy itself and was based on a "Declaration of Principles" set forth for the country, which could vary according to different information-society themes (economic development, human capital, health and public services, democratic participation and social integration). Although some countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela, had embarked on that process in the late 1990s, others were still at the formulation stage.

20. The second stage involved the design of public policies to enable the new institutional structure to function. Countries had chosen either decentralization or centralization; but it was the latter model that had proven more conclusive – involving a large number of civil servants (generally between 20 and 30) and a larger budget (on the order of US$ 10 million). With regard to e-government, which had been developing over the last few years, the goal was to promote the need for citizens and society to evolve rather than exclusively favour technical aspects of the information society.

21. The last stage concerned implementation and follow-up. The nature of ICTs continued to evolve, making it ever necessary to adapt public policies to new situations. It was essential to fine-tune suitable follow-up mechanisms and indicators to evaluate progress in the move towards an information society.

22. At the regional level, the Commission was currently preparing a plan of action for Latin America and the Caribbean, which would take account of both national specifics and the global requirements defined at the World Summit on the Information Society. At the international level, it was collaborating with the European Union, and drew inspiration from its initiatives, notably e-Europe.

23. At the regional level, it was possible to study the effects of the first phase of the World Summit and to work to achieve the objectives defined in the Plan of Action adopted at that event. A regional conference

was being organized to prepare the second phase of the Summit (2005).

24. Paragraph 134 of the Secretary-General's report mentioned a number of activities implemented by the Commission to promote the advent of a global information society, such as the creation of the Observatory on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean, the role of which should be extended beyond the region.

25. In late 2004, the United Nations regional commissions would hold regional workshops to review global and regional needs in terms of statistics on ICTs, to ensure that the particular needs of developing countries were taken into account, and that those countries managed to set up internationally comparable indicators.

26. The speaker concluded by noting that the region was lagging behind the rest of the world in the ICT field. Expenditure on this area in relation to GDP and connectivity were still insignificant. To catch up, other systems needed to be exploited, such as mobile telephony. Mexico and Argentina were the regional leaders in terms of online purchases, although the figures were fairly low (7 per cent and 3 per cent respectively), whereas online product sales were very limited. In contrast, results were more convincing in the e-government sphere, where countries such as Chile and Mexico had put a large amount of data online.

27. **Mr. Amoáko** (Economic Commission for Africa) explained that ECA had made efforts in the 1990s to raise awareness among its member States of the importance and significance of ICTs for Africa, in order to prevent the continent being marginalized. The African Information Society Initiative had therefore been launched to enable African countries to make collective use of ICTs to promote their development programmes. The initiative included raising public awareness of ICTs at all levels of the population (experiences in countries such as South Africa, Morocco, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal or Tunisia had identified a number of best practices that could be proposed to other countries); democratization of information access, to prevent the emergence of a digital divide on the African continent, while also taking account of women, the rural and urban dimensions, and applications for people less familiar with the respective technologies; infrastructure development; and Internet access (in 1996, only six African countries were linked up, whereas practically all are today).

28. The Commission had also encouraged Governments to build ICTs into their national planning, in order to facilitate their use. Several of the Millennium Development Goals related to the information society in Africa, so the Commission's member States needed to understand the full importance of those technologies for agriculture, education, poverty reduction, or even health, and not consider them as a luxury. Partnerships were very important for ICT development, since they forced countries, their Governments and development partners to coordinate the approach adopted.

29. Several challenges would need to be addressed in the future: first and foremost, digital literacy, which required high-quality school teaching and therefore better human resources. Two initiatives had been implemented in this area: Schoolnet Africa (which had started by putting African schools into a national and regional network); and Varsity Net (which was helping African universities and research establishments to use networks to share information or even do joint research). Subsequently, public-private partnerships would need to be established to address the high cost of infrastructure, along with regulatory frameworks to foster a competitive environment for those technologies. It would also be necessary to provide a legal framework for e-commerce and e-government. Lastly, the problem of the language used by Internet sites would need to be resolved. As 85 per cent of websites were currently written in English, it would be necessary to make sure information was disseminated in African languages.

30. **Ms. Tallawy** (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) explained that the regional commissions were implementing a large number of cooperation projects, and that preparatory work for the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society, at the national and regional levels, had achieved considerable progress.

31. The Secretary-General's report showed that the regional commissions needed to join forces to implement the Plan of Action adopted at the most recent phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, taking account of the objectives of each region. ESCWA was also carefully studying the two questions raised during the Summit, concerning Internet governance and the Digital Solidarity Fund.

32. The concept of Internet governance entailed oversight and supervision of the worldwide web, which was an essential resource for socioeconomic development. The Commission's strategy in that connection had been presented at the Global Forum on Internet Governance (March 2004).

33. The most frequent criticisms concerned questions of justice and efficacy. The issue of justice was a priority, and when fair representation was achieved it would be possible to adopt an Internet Charter. While improving the efficacy of e-government, it would be necessary to ensure appropriate representation, without which governance would not be fair, and efficacy could not be consolidated on a permanent basis. A strategy based on genuine participation and balanced supervision was therefore a priority.

34. All stakeholders – especially Governments, the private sector and civil society – needed to participate in the strategic planning and evolution of Internet governance. The regional commissions had a catalytic role to play in strengthening the capacities of stakeholders in their respective regions, in accordance with a strategy based on fair representation, targeted on immediate objectives with long-term effects.

35. In the case of the Digital Solidarity Fund, public-private partnerships for enabling initiatives needed to be promoted, pursuant to the Plan of Action of the World Summit. Three roundtables would be organized in the region for that purpose.

36. A prudent approach of that type, supported by consensus among the international community, would allow for development of the ICT sector, thanks to a more favourable legal and regulatory environment that was cognizant of global trends. The Commission's member States should adopt an information society model that did not exclude any citizen, and strive to erase disparities in terms of infrastructures and accessibility. Information and communication technology applications in the domain of government, public administration, education and healthcare, as well as in the business world, should be more closely linked to the development objectives of the respective countries.

37. In conclusion, study of the ICT situation in the region in the various domains (policies, strategies, legal and regulatory frameworks, infrastructures, capacity-building, sector development, training and trade, e-governance and healthcare) demonstrated the development status of the Commission's 13 member countries. Iraq, Palestine and the Yemen were the three least advanced, as a result of the conflicts they had been involved in. Lastly, progress had been made in the region in terms of education, and the use of ICTs could help to fight unemployment.

38. **Mr. Ayari** (Tunisia) said that he shared the view of the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions on the importance of ICTs for economic and social development, and the need for the international community to make a priority of reducing the digital divide. The latter represented a development gap that translated into a growth disparity between rich and poor countries. There were still much to do to assist developing countries, particularly in Africa, to benefit from the digital revolution and fully integrate into the world economy. It was clear that the question of financing and implementation of infrastructures to exploit the new technologies was a key issue. Tunisia supported the calls made by the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions for developed countries to help their developing counterparts to fully exploit ICTs in order to speed up their economic and social development. He also supported the proliferation of partnerships, especially between the public and private sectors, and the strengthening of South-South and triangular cooperation – strengthening of the latter was particularly important, but had perhaps not been stressed sufficiently. Lastly, Tunisia supported the implementation of structures within the regional commissions to support the exploitation of ICTs.

39. **Mr. Koolschyn** (Netherlands) said that the tone of the debate had at times been somewhat negative, with the words "gap", "divide", "threat" and "exclusion" often being heard. Nonetheless, as several speakers had acknowledged, ICTs held out great promise. They could help achieve the Millennium Development Goals in all sectors of activity: health, education, administration, culture, etc. They were also a very good way to promote good governance and autonomy, to strengthen transparency and accountability in the political domain, and to give a voice to the poor. Furthermore, by facilitating the transfer of knowledge and competencies, they offered numerous possibilities for narrowing development gaps between countries. The speaker therefore wanted know how the regional commissions intended to help countries make the most of the enormous potential that ICTs represented.

40. Making use of ICTs required a certain level of education and know-how. Having a computer was one thing; knowing how to make use of it was another. It would be helpful if the regional commissions could specify the activities through which they intended to

help their member States provide their populations with the level of education and skills needed to take advantage of ICTs.

41. Lastly, ICTs offered numerous possibilities to the United Nations system itself, by facilitating the dissemination of information on its organizations' activities and the knowledge they had acquired. The speaker wanted to hear the regional commissions' views on that subject.

42. **Ms. Ghanashyam** (India) said that developing countries could not be allowed to miss out on the digital revolution, because their development backwardness would then be insurmountable. In view of the pace of ICT evolution and the constant widening of the digital divide, it was essential for the international community to agree as quickly as possible to help developing countries exploit ICTs, in order to ensure a better standard of living for their populations. The United Nations in particular had a crucial role to play in that regard.

43. India had made exploitation of ICTs one of its key priorities, and it was focused on the goal of bringing the new technologies within the reach of everyone nationwide by 2008. Accordingly, it was implementing the necessary infrastructures and strengthening capacities to develop human resources. A massive ICT awareness-raising campaign, creation of ICT information kiosks, promotion of ICT training in all primary and secondary schools, creation of virtual libraries at the federal and state levels, and promotion of ICTs for agricultural and integrated rural development purposes, particularly virtual villages, had done much to spread public awareness of the new technologies across the country, and had helped generalize their use. India was also working to develop e-government, which made it possible to bring public authorities closer to the public at large.

44. The innovation policy implemented by the Government over the years had proven decisive for the country's information technology success. That policy had mainly consisted of creating higher education in engineering and technical disciplines, implementing an institutional structure for the formulation and application of scientific and technical policies, and creating centres of excellence and numerous technical training establishments. In addition, certain public-policy initiatives such as the installation of software technology parks, had proven very useful for the export of information technology techniques and products. The success achieved by India in the ICT domain could be said to have stemmed from the decisive actions taken by the public authorities, which had created an enabling environment for a powerful information technology industry to develop nationwide.

45. The IT industry was India's fastest developing economic sector in terms of production and exports. Currently, it was completely liberalized, except for the aerospace and military sectors; and, thanks to the liberalization of foreign investment and of import-export policies, it was attracting considerable amounts of international investment. For several years India had been specializing in software development and the provision of information technology services worldwide. The Government was also taking all necessary steps to make the country a major power and pioneer in that area, as shown by the creation of a special national working group on information technologies and software development. During the course of fiscal 2003/2004, estimated gross revenues from the Indian IT industry amounted to over US$ 15.9 billion, of which US$ 12.5 billion were export earnings.

46. The IT revolution offered new possibilities for growth and development in numerous regions around the world. The process could even enable some countries to skip certain technical development stages, as the example of India showed. It was not a panacea, however, and could not solve problems of poverty and underdevelopment on its own: the provision of social, education and basic sanitation services, and the development of industries both traditional and modern, were indispensable for ensuring the success of human development strategies and lasting poverty reduction.

47. India therefore shared the opinion expressed by the Secretary-General in paragraph 146 of his report E/2004/15, that ICTs were not an end in themselves, but a means towards achieving a diversified and multidimensional information society.

48. India also agreed with the opinion stated the same paragraph that the regional commissions could provide valuable support to their member States by ensuring that the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of each region, subregion and country were taken into account when they formulated guidelines and performed analytical work on ICTs and the information society.

49. **Mr. Kogda** (Burkina Faso) said that ICT development, particularly the Internet, had spawned a number of websites of somewhat unhealthy content, which often posed a danger from the standpoint of social mores and even people's security. He wanted to

know what the regional commissions intended to do to discourage the creation of this type of site.

50. **Mr. Cissé** (Senegal) put the debate in perspective by arguing that two basic questions needed to be answered: how the different regions intended to ensure that ICTs acted as catalysts to achieve development objectives such as the Millennium Development Goals; and how the regional commissions intended to help their member countries meet that challenge.

51. On the second of those questions, the representative of Senegal felt bound to congratulate ECA for the very significant support given to African countries in the IT domain. It was on the initiative of the Commission that the Conference of African Ministers of Economic and Social Development and Planning had adopted the African Information Society Initiative, which had helped African countries to realize they could not afford to miss out on the digital revolution. It was also responsible for the Scan-ICT project which aimed to measure the ICT utilization rates and their incidence on socioeconomic development; along with the ICT awareness-raising project for decision-makers, parliamentarians, universities, media and civil society organizations; and the African Virtual library network, created in 2001.

52. African countries had understood that having missed out on the Industrial Revolution, they needed to do everything possible to avoid being left behind by the digital revolution. Nonetheless, the fact was that a digital divide had developed, which, if not reduced, threatened to largely exclude them from the benefits. The nature of the divide, as the President had mentioned in his introductory remarks, was less a matter of quantity than one of quality, and therefore investment. For that reason African countries had called for the implementation of financial mechanisms; and Senegal, in particular, had proposed the creation of the Digital Solidarity Fund at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society – a proposal that had since become an African initiative. The representative of Senegal wondered how the ECA intended to support the proposal. The Senegalese delegation knew that a UNDP working group on that issue had been established, as recommended at the World Summit on the Information Society, but it also considered it very important for the ECA itself to support the proposal.

53. Another major problem for African countries was the language used on the Internet. While 85 per cent of Internet pages were in English, 85 per cent of African countries were not Anglophone. The Senegalese delegation welcomed the efforts made by ECA on that issue – particularly the initiative taken in collaboration with the University of Addis Ababa, aimed at diversifying the language used on the Internet – but even so it believed it would be worthwhile to help African Internet users master English. It therefore asked the ECA Executive Secretary to give his opinion on the subject.

54. With regard to Internet governance, an issue widely debated during preparations for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, the Senegalese delegation would like the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to give details of the ICT indicators mentioned in paragraph 134 of the report of the Secretary-General on "Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields" (E/2004/15). Whatever the response given to the issue of Internet governance, indicators accepted by all stakeholders would be one of the basic elements.

55. **Mr. Elbakly** (Egypt) agreed with the developing-country delegations that had highlighted the need to reduce the digital divide, and wanted the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions to say more about financial mechanisms to help reduce that divide, especially those implemented by regional development banks and in partnership with international financial institutions. He would also like to know whether regional development banks intended to make the funding of IT development in developing countries one of their top priorities for assistance.

56. **Ms. Interiano** (El Salvador) said that the Salvadoran Government had established infocentres in urban and rural areas, and was working to finalize an e-government programme and to follow up commitments undertaken at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. With regard to the plan of action on information technology that had been established at the Latin American and Caribbean level, she would like to know whether the initiative, which would be modelled on the e-Europe initiative, included the exchange of experiences and technical cooperation between the region's most digitally advanced countries and the rest.

57. **Ms. Tallawy** (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), replying firstly to the question posed by the representative of the Netherlands on ICTs and NGOs, stated that ESCWA was working to rebuild the part of Lebanon that was liberated in 2000, with

help from NGOs working there, pursuant to the mandate given to regional commissions regarding relief for countries emerging from conflict situations. In the poverty-stricken villages in that part of Lebanon, ESCWA had set up two information technology training centres to give young people the chance to acquire skills. She called on military personnel in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to offer courses.

58. In answer to the question raised by the representative of Egypt, ESCWA was encouraging financial institutions in the region to fund the development of information technology in particular and development in general. Those organizations had generally tended to contribute to the attainment of objectives established by Members States of the United Nations at major events such as the Conference on Development Financing. Nonetheless, it was to be hoped that member countries of the Commission would also encourage them to contribute towards achieving those objectives.

59. **Mr. Hak-Śu Kim** (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), replying to questions from the representatives of Egypt and Senegal about the role of regional commissions in the funding of IT development, stated that they were essentially concerned with policy formulation and certain aspects of human resource development, while infrastructure was the preserve of Governments and donor countries. For member States in the Asia and Pacific region, there was the possibility that two donor countries, Japan and Australia, and the Asian Development Bank, through its Asia Development Fund, would help finance information technology development.

60. **Mr. Machinea** (Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean), replying to various questions on the possibilities raised by the current situation in terms of new technologies, and the dangers they presented, said that while there were real possibilities for rapid transfer of IT techniques from one country to another, the quantity of knowledge to be acquired and access to IT material and software posed enormous problems in low-income countries. Unless Governments pursued energetic policies to resolve such problems, the inequalities between countries were likely to widen.

61. The problems posed were essentially threefold. The most important related to information technology training. As an example, ECLAC was currently working with the region's Governments to see how schools in general, and public schools in particular, could provide training for pupils in information technology; and also how to make sure young people could have a computer at home with Internet access. The next problem was then the high cost of such computers and software. In Brazil, for example, software had been provided free to enable young people to access the Internet. The third problem related to production. There, the possibilities were very numerous, but it was not sufficient to have software programs; they needed to be adapted and disseminated to turn the Internet into a very broad information channel. It was also important to consider how to train the working population in IT skills.

62. In reply to the question on indicators posed by the representative of Senegal, it was not only a matter of creating indicators but also harmonizing them regionally. ECLAC was discussing the strategies and information technology statistics that the countries of the region should possess, and the same probably applied to the other regional commissions.

63. On the issue of funding raised by the representative of Egypt, it was true that the financing of information technology development was a worrying problem. ECLAC was working with the Inter-American Development Bank to see how Governments could be helped to design strategies, but also to encourage the private sector to provide specific assistance in applying them, issues on which the Commission had a very clear strategy.

64. Lastly, in reply to the question posed by the representative of El Salvador about the exchange of experiences, ECLAC was collaborating with the other regional commissions to that end. Seminars for the exchange of experiences were organized regularly; and these were all the more important given that the situation differed widely from one country to another.

65. **Ms. Schmögnerová** (Economic Commission for Europe), replying to the representative of the Netherlands, stated that collaboration between Governments, NGOs and international agencies was essential; and that experience demonstrated the need to ensure participation from the business world in domains where information and communications technology played an important role in development. Enterprises were participating particularly in devising regulations and standards for e-commerce and transport, and NGOs often had recourse to the Convention on Access to Environmental Information.

66. Concerning the use of ICTs within the United Nations system, ECE had recently been engaged to upgrade a tripartite strategy for information technology use.

67. With regard to the funding needed to bridge the digital divide, the ECE region benefited from the presence of sound financial institutions, facilitating the implementation of a knowledge-based economy, training and communications, by offering both credits but technical assistance. The role of the regional commissions was to raise public awareness of such institutions.

68. **Mr. Amoáko** (Economic Commission for Africa), replying to the representative of the Netherlands, agreed that civil society participation was a key issue. In recognition of that fact, ECA had set up an ICT technical assistance committee which was calling for contributions from society. It was also working in collaboration with the Governments of African countries to formulate national ICT strategies.

69. The Commission was itself also using ICTs, and had recently created an audiovisual production service, reflecting the fact that radio broadcasts played a leading role in Africa.

70. The Economic Commission for Africa was also making efforts to promote the use of ICTs in teaching, particularly at the higher education level. Replying to the representative of Burkina Faso who was concerned about the negative uses to which ICTs were susceptible, the speaker reiterated that the solution required African countries to finalize a suitable legislative framework, bearing in mind international law.

71. Addressing the representative from Senegal, the speaker stated that, just as it had collaborated with African countries in preparation of the Bamako Declaration before the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, ECA was currently working with those countries to establish a common African position for presentation at the second phase of the Summit in Tunis.

72. Regarding the language problem, he noted that the issue remained to be defined, and the use of local languages or English needed to be developed.

73. **Mr. Hak-Śu Kim** (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) stated that ESCAP was currently preparing two regional and four subregional meetings with a view to the second phase of the Summit in Tunis. The subregional meetings would take place in Kyrgyzstan in November 2004, Fiji in December 2004, Nepal in January 2005 and Vietnam in March 2005.

74. **Mr. Machinea** (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) stated that, in collaboration its member States, ECLAC was preparing regional meetings on indicators, which should be held by the end of 2004. The results would be presented at a meeting to be held in February 2005, the aim of which was to assist the countries of the region to prepare the second phase of the Summit in Tunis.

75. **Ms. Schmögnerová** (Economic Commission for Europe) said that, at the annual session of ECE in February 2004, member States had been reluctant to make commitments on the process of preparing the second phase of the Summit. Since then, however, the situation had evolved.

76. The Commission was participating in the work of the ICT study group; it was serving as liaison between the Secretariat of the Summit and the other commissions; and, in collaboration with member States and ESCAP, it had organized a meeting on ICT applications to be held in Kyrgyzstan in November 2004. It was also involved in ICT development in south-eastern Europe.

77. **Ms. Tallawy** (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) noted that negotiations between the various Governments of the region had enabled them to agree on the place and date of the regional preparatory meeting for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in November 2004. A meeting with the Arab League and the Secretariat of Ministers of Telecommunications of the League's member countries, should also take place either before or after the preparatory meeting. Two other meetings were scheduled to take place in 2005, which would address Internet content. ESCWA was also coordinating its activities with ECA.

78. **Mr. Amoáko** (Economic Commission for Africa) mentioned that a meeting of African ministers had been held in Dakar in April 2004, and another was scheduled to be held in Ghana in February 2005.

79. **Mr. Sardenberg** (Brazil) (Rapporteur) highlighted the importance of the questions raised and the scope of the task that remained to be accomplished in the ICT domain. He noted with satisfaction, and as an example of the path to be followed, the fact that Estonia was allocating 0.2 per cent of its annual GDP

to installing Internet in its primary and secondary schools.

80. **The President** drew the meeting to a close by echoing the observation made by the representative of the Netherlands: having a computer was not enough; one had to know how to make use of it. The time had come to adopt a culture that placed major emphasis on information technology, particularly if the aim was to bridge the digital divide.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.